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Author name: Smith, A.

Title: Thomas Bassett Macaulay and the Bahamas: racism, business, and Canadian sub-imperialism.

Article & version: Post-print version

Original citation & hyperlink:

Smith, A. (2009) Thomas Bassett Macaulay and the Bahamas: racism, business, and Canadian sub-imperialism. *Journal of imperial and commonwealth history*, volume 37 (1): 29-50

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03086530902757696>

Publisher statement:

This is an electronic version of an article published in the Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 37 (1), pp.29-50. The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History is available online at:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03086530902757696>

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Thomas Bassett Macaulay and the Bahamas: Racism, Business, and Canadian Sub-Imperialism

In 1911, Thomas Bassett Macaulay, a Montreal insurance magnate, launched a campaign to have the Bahamas incorporated into Canada. Macaulay thought that the annexation of the Bahamas would encourage other colonies in the British West Indies to become Canadian provinces. Macaulay's handling of the delicate issue of race shows that he was remarkably progressive for a Canadian imperialist of his generation: Macaulay denounced discrimination on the basis of skin colour and said that he wanted to grant Black Bahamians full political rights once they joined Canada. However, Macaulay's plan was soon frustrated by the prevailing conviction that it was unfeasible to incorporate a jurisdiction with a Black majority into Canada. In 1912, Canada negotiated a simple trade agreement with the British West Indies rather than the political union Macaulay had formerly envisioned. This article will suggest that Macaulay's initiative failed, in part, because of anxieties about 'race' in Canada, in the West Indies, and within the Colonial Office. These anxieties, along with the actions of the maladroit governor of the Bahamas, helped to kill the plans to include the islands in Canada.

Macaulay's liberal views stand in sharp contrast to those of Sir Robert Borden, Canada's Prime Minister between 1911 and 1920. In 1916, when the annexation of Jamaica by Canada was being discussed, Borden opined that the acquisition of 'subject races' by Canada would be a good thing because it would assimilate

conditions within the Dominion to those prevailing in the British Empire as a whole.¹ Borden envisioned Jamaica as a sort of colony under the paternalistic administration of white officials appointed by Ottawa. The island would be Canada's reward for sending young men to the trenches of the Western Front. Similar assumptions informed the wartime discussions of the possible annexation of other territories by Canada. Greenland, Trinidad, and Antigua were all candidates considered for annexation by Canadian officials. In every case, it was assumed that these territories would not be represented in the Dominion parliament and would instead be administered as colonies. Considered in isolation, Borden's racist comments can be used to reinforce the thesis that racism was an inherent part of Canada's sub-imperialism.² In contrast, Macaulay's thoughts and actions bolster the view that racism and Canadian imperialism were not necessarily linked. In early twentieth century Canada, it was possible to be non-racist and a staunch imperialist.

Macaulay's experience forces us to develop a more nuanced view of the relationship between race and imperialism than has hitherto been presented. In recent years, historians in Canada and the other former 'White Dominions' have rediscovered the British Empire's impact on their countries. They have explored the ways in which the Dominions were shaped by their membership in the imagined

¹ Borden to Sir George Perley, 3 June 1916, in Sir Robert Borden Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, microfilm C-4314. Borden's comments have been cited in the existing historical literature on Canada's wartime plans for southern expansion Wigley, 'Canada and Imperialism'; Samaroo, 'The Politics of Disharmony'.

² In this context, sub-imperialism refers to the desire of British Dominions to acquire colonies of their own. The Australian-run territory of Papua was an example of sub-imperialism in practice. For Australia's efforts to build a sub-Empire in the Pacific, see Thompson, *Australian Imperialism*.

community of the British World.³ 'Race' has been a major theme of the British World historiography.⁴ Many historians emphasise that ideas regarding the inherent inferiority of particular ethnic and racial groups were an integral part of the ideology of British imperialism.⁵ For instance, race is a major theme of Adele Perry's study of British Columbia's place in the British World.⁶ The recent literature on Australia's place in the British World stresses that ideas of racial superiority were intertwined with Australia's British identity. This identity was, in turn, connected to both the White Australia immigration policy and Australian sub-imperialism.⁷

The conclusion one might draw from the secondary literature showing that racism and British imperialism were linked is that the White Dominions might have been less racist had they not been part of the British Empire. Such a conclusion would be, at best, a dramatic over-simplification. Racism was indeed an important strand in British imperial thought and practice, but there were countervailing tendencies at work. One of these was the imperial government's long track record of restraining the racism of the white Dominions. For a mixture of ethical and pragmatic reasons, the Colonial Office had frequently intervened to protect both aboriginals and non-white

³ Buckner, *Canada and the British Empire*; Buckner and Francis, *Canada and the British world*. Much of the Canadian literature builds on Carl Berger's insight that in the period 1867-1914, Canadian nationalism and loyalty to Britain were compatible and mutually reinforcing strains in Canadian thought. Berger, *Sense of Power*.

⁴ Lorimer, 'From Victorian Values To White Virtues'; Hall, 'What Did a British World Mean'; Hirst, 'Empire, State, Nation'; Carter, 'Aboriginal People'.

⁵ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Burton, *Burdens of History*;

⁶ Perry, *On The Edge of Empire*.

⁷ Richards, 'Migrations'; Ward, 'Security', 245-6.

migrants from governments elected by white settlers.⁸ Another countervailing tendency was the strong assimilationist or ‘civilisational’ tradition in British thought that favoured the integration of non-whites into British culture rather than their segregation and exclusion.⁹ As Douglas Lorimer has observed, in ‘the long nineteenth century, the discourse of race can be characterized as a contest between voices for the assimilation of colonial others and those advocating forms of separate development or racial exclusion’.¹⁰ These two traditions, segregationist racism and the assimilation project, were equally compatible with British imperialism, as both held that the culture of the colonising group was superior to that of the colonised.¹¹ However, it would be a mistake to conflate the two traditions by labelling the British World as monolithically racist.

The politics of race in Canada in the early twentieth century reflected the complexity of British thinking in this period. In the eyes of imperialist Canadians such as Thomas Bassett Macaulay, the chief threat to the British Empire was not the non-white ‘Other’, but rather the growing influence of the United States (i.e., a state governed by fellow Anglo-Saxons). As Edward Parliament Kohn has shown, racist

⁸ Miller, ‘Petitioning’, 303-15; Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, 183-8; Offer, *The First World War*, 176-197.

⁹ Peter Mandler contrasts the ‘civilisational’ tradition rooted in the Scottish Enlightenment with biological or organic concepts of race and nationality. He argues that British conservatives made few ‘significant moves towards organic nationalism’ before the First World War and that ‘a comparatively weak, non-racial, non-organic idea of nation’ informed their thinking. Mandler, ‘Race and Nation’, 244.

¹⁰ Lorimer, ‘From Victorian Values to White Virtues’, 110.

¹¹ As the research of Peter Henshaw has shown, there was also a third tradition that might be labelled as ‘imperialist-multiculturalist’. Henshaw demonstrated that as Governor-General Lord Tweedsmuir encouraged Canadians to celebrate their ethnic diversity. See Peter Henshaw ‘John Buchan’.

theories that stressed the importance of common Anglo-Saxon ancestry led some Canadians in this period to embrace the idea of closer cooperation with the United States and the fellowship of all English-speaking peoples.¹² Macaulay was not part of this group. Like many other opponents of the 1911 Canada-United States Reciprocity Agreement, Macaulay rejected the project of continental integration precisely because he favoured a Canada closely connected to Britain. Macaulay saw the annexation of the tropical territories as a means of strengthening Canada and the Empire vis-à-vis the Republic.

Macaulay's campaign also causes us to think about the role of race in the process by which various British territories in North America were united to form the Dominion of Canada. Race influenced which territories were included, which were excluded, and the terms on which they were admitted to Canada. The assumptions about which territories merited local self-government were indeed racial. By the early twentieth century, the Dominion consisted of self-governing 'provinces' in the temperate south and northern 'territories' with aboriginal majorities. The latter were administered by appointed officials. Although the criteria for local home rule were not explicitly racial, the proportion of whites in the local population determined the status of a territory; the Canadian Prairies were given local home rule only after they had acquired a sizeable white population.¹³ This implicitly racial constitutional arrangement mirrored the situation in the Empire of which Canada was a part: the

¹² Kohn, *This Kindred People*.

¹³ Participants in the debate on home rule for the Canadian Prairies used the euphemism 'qualified voter' rather than the more direct term 'white'. However, they were clearly speaking about people of European ancestry. Thomas, *The Struggle for Responsible Government*, 133-4, 138.

Empire's 'White Dominions' enjoyed internal autonomy and democratic institutions, while other territories were administered, sometimes brutally, by white officials sent out from Britain.¹⁴ Macaulay's campaign to make the Bahamas, which was inhabited by English-speaking and largely Protestant Blacks, into a Canadian 'province,' raised awkward questions for Canada, a country then confronting a host of linguistic, ethnic, and confessional issues.

Canadian historians have expended little effort in explaining why the various plans to acquire territory in the West Indies failed. Robin Winks, the author of the most thorough study of Canadian interest in tropical expansion to date, argued that the union initiative of 1911-1912 would have failed, 'even had the Colonial Office stood behind' its promoters. His reasoning was that many of the federations created by Britain's Colonial Office were short-lived and that 'artificially and externally enlarged' political units have a natural tendency to fail.¹⁵ Given that Winks published this work in 1968, just after the collapse of several British colonial federations, it is easy to see why he arrived at this interpretation. However, his explanation is untenable because Canada is itself a highly artificial entity. Canada had been put together in the 1860s by the Colonial Office working in conjunction with a small clique of businessmen and cooperative colonial politicians.¹⁶ Moreover, Canada has survived for several generations despite being an 'artificially and externally enlarged' polity. Nova Scotia is much closer to the British West Indies than it is to Vancouver, so it is futile to point to geography as the sole

¹⁴ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 395.

¹⁵ Winks, *Canadian-West Indian Union*, 44.

¹⁶ Martin, *Britain and the Origins of Canadian Confederation*; Smith, *British Businessmen*.

explanation for why these British territories were not joined to Canada. Historians need to integrate race into their explanations as to why Canada failed to expand into the West Indies. Race was probably the most important single factor that undermined the plans for tropical expansion. Whether the Bahamas could ever have become 'Canada's Florida' is an interesting counterfactual, but the fact other industrialised democracies have politically-integrated *départements outre-mer* suggests that the geographical or non-racial barriers involved were not insurmountable. The fact the Bahamas were separated from Canada by salt water did not, by itself, doom Macaulay's initiative.

The Bahamas are an archipelago south east of Florida. Nassau, the capital, is located on New Providence island, which is at the same latitude as the Florida Keys. In 1911, the colony had about 65,000 people. Most of the population were Black or mixed race, although on some islands whites were in the majority. Many of members of the white mercantile elite of Nassau were of United Empire Loyalist descent and could trace their ancestry back to the southern United States.¹⁷ Nassau's oligarchy was known by the metonym 'Bay Street', which was the main commercial street of Nassau.

In constitutional terms, the Bahamas occupied a position between the self-governing White Dominions and a Crown colony. Britain's Crown Colonies were ruled by a governor whose authority was not checked by an elected assembly, and the legislative functions were delegated to an unelected council consisting of the

¹⁷ Similarly, many English-speaking Canadians could trace the ancestors to the Loyalists who fled the northern colonies during the Revolution. For the Loyalist migration to the Bahamas, see Prokopow, 'To the Torrid Zones', 117-30.

Governor and his appointees. In the Bahamas, however, there was an elected House of Assembly of the sort familiar to students of pre-1840s Canadian history. Responsible Government on the Canadian model had not been introduced in the Bahamas because Britain's Colonial Office thought that self-government was inappropriate in a colony with a non-white majority. On the other hand, the Bahamas had escaped the fate of most of the other West Indian colonies, which had been deprived of their elective assemblies in the decades after the end of slavery.¹⁸ The criteria for voting in the Bahamas made no reference to race and many Blacks had enough property to enjoy the franchise. Nevertheless, the colony's legislature was dominated by whites and only three of its twenty-nine members were Black.¹⁹ Discrimination against Blacks, although very real, was less virulent than in the southern United States. Contemporary American visitors to the Bahamas were struck by the relative absence of prejudice, such as the desegregation of amenities.²⁰

Thomas Macaulay's business career had significant overseas dimensions that help explain his interest in the Bahamas. His father, Robertson Macaulay, had migrated to Canada in 1854 from Scotland. Thomas was born in Hamilton in 1860, where his father was an insurance salesman. From 1875 to 1908, Robertson served as

¹⁸ Parry and Sherlock, *Short History of the West Indies*, 212; *West India Committee Circular*, 'The Status of the Bahamas,' 11 February 1913, 59.

¹⁹ Sir William Grey-Wilson, Governor of the Bahamas, to Vernon Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 6 May 1911, file 16891, Colonial Office 23/267 in National Archives (United Kingdom).

²⁰ However, there was a striking demonstration of segregation during the First World War, when Bahamian Black volunteers were placed in the West Indian regiment, while local whites were sent to serve with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 2: 91, 228; Johnson, *Post-Emancipation Race Relations in the Bahamas*.

the managing director of the Sun Life Assurance Company of Montreal. Under Robertson's stewardship, Sun Life grew into the largest insurance provider in the Dominion. By the 1880s, the firm had agents in every province of Canada, even distant British Columbia.²¹

Thomas Macaulay joined the firm at the age of seventeen, and devoted several years to mastering the body of knowledge required by the Institute of Actuaries, which was the governing body for the profession in England, Wales, and the settlement colonies.²² Thomas's ability to calculate risks was put to use when he accompanied his father on an 1879 trip to determine the feasibility of insuring people in the West Indies. Early Sun Life policies followed the widespread British practice of prohibiting customers from living south of 33 degrees 33 minutes latitude. The statistics compiled by Thomas demonstrated that the mortality rates in the West Indies need not preclude issuing policies there at a profit. Sun Life introduced a new type of policy without the customary restrictions on geography. Sun Life's world-wide coverage paved the way for rapid expansion in the Caribbean, where agencies were soon established.²³

Sun Life's move into the region was part of a broader pattern. As H.V. Nelles and Chris Armstrong demonstrate in their study of Canadian investment in the Caribbean and Latin America, there was a southward rush of Canadian firms in this

²¹ *The Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada: an Outline History*, 12; Obituary for Thomas Bassett Macaulay, *Times*, 6 April 1942, 6.

²² Macaulay wrote second level associate exams in 1897. In that year, the Institute held examinations in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Montreal and Toronto. See *Journal of the Institute of Actuaries* 33 (1897), 440.

²³ Schull, *The Century of the Sun*, 12, 20.

period.²⁴ The West Indies, however, were not the only overseas market Sun Life pursued. In the early 1890s, agencies were established in China, India, Singapore, and Japan. For many years, the head of Sun Life's operations in India was Sir Phiroze C. C. Kharshedji Sethna, a Parsee merchant best known to historians for his involvement in Bombay's film industry and the Tata industrial empire.²⁵ Sun Life's willingness to employ a non-white person as the head of its operations in British India is suggestive of liberal attitudes on the part of its Canadian managers. The settlement in 1894 of a legal dispute with Sun Life, an unrelated British firm which chanced to have the same name, permitted expansion across the Atlantic. By 1900, Sun Life of Canada had established agencies in London and other British cities. Agents were also appointed in France and the Low Countries.

1895 saw Sun Life's first attempts to penetrate the United States market with the establishment of an agency in the border city of Detroit. The company gradually established a presence in a number of states but did not sell policies in the most populous states of the Union.²⁶ Macaulay's ambivalence towards the United States that was typically Canadian. Macaulay certainly had no objections to insuring American lives or to investing in American firms such as the Illinois Street Traction

²⁴ Quigley, 'The Bank of Nova Scotia in the Caribbean, 1889-1940'; Baum, *The Banks of Canada in the Commonwealth Caribbean*, 21; Armstrong and Nelles, *Southern Exposure*.

²⁵ Schull, *Century of the Sun*, 34, 61, 67, 102; Brian Shoesmith 'From Monopoly to Commodity: The Bombay Studios in the 1930s'; Misra, 'Business Culture' and Entrepreneurship in British India, 1860-1950', 335; Tomlinson, 'Colonial Firms and the Decline of Colonialism in Eastern India 1914-47', 457.

²⁶ Schull, *Century of the Sun*, 35-37.

Company.²⁷ In politics, however, his preference was that Canada should negotiate trade agreements with the countries of the British Empire rather than rely on exports to the United States.²⁸ Canada had taken an important step towards imperial preference in 1897, when the Laurier government had granted Britain preference in the Canadian market. This meant that British goods entering Canada would pay lower customs duties than equivalent foreign, chiefly American, goods. In 1898, Canada extended this tariff preference to the British possessions in the West Indies. In 1900, the preference for British and British colonial goods was increased.²⁹ In addition to implementing a form of imperial preference, the Canadian government encouraged trade with the British West Indies via new shipping subsidies. In 1899, the Canadian and British governments began a joint subsidy to allow Messrs Pickford and Black to operate a fortnightly steamer service connecting Halifax with Bermuda, St. Lucia, Barbados, and Trinidad. A monthly run to the less populous islands of St. Kitts, Antigua, Montserrat, St. Vincent, Grenada, and Tobago was also started.³⁰ These policies encouraged some of the West Indian colonies to re-orient their trade to

²⁷ Drummond, 'Canadian Life Insurance Companies and the Capital Market, 1890-1914', 218; *Truth*, 5 June 1912, 1424, financial editor's reply to 'Alpha' and 'Cawnpore'; *Nassau Guardian*, 'Truth and Mr. Macaulay: the Bull Moose of Insurance' 7 August 1912, 2.

²⁸ *Canada West India Magazine*, June 1911, T.B. Macaulay, 'Imperial Trade and Imperial Defence', 20-21.

²⁹ Hart, *A Trading Nation*, 73; Memoranda 'West Indian Commercial Relations with Canada and the United States of America' p.6 in 'Trade Relations Between Canada and the West Indies.' CO 884/10.

³⁰ *Times*, 29 December 1899, 'The West Indies', 10; D. Morris, Imperial Commissioner of Agriculture for the West Indies to Colonial Office, 9 September 1903, printed in 'Correspondence Relating to the Steamship Service between Canada and the West Indies' p.1-2, in CO 884/10; 'Minutes of Conference Relating the Trade Relations between the West Indies and the Dominion of Canada', 17 January 1908, in 'Trade Relations Between Canada and the West Indies.', p.178 in CO 884/10.

Canada. For instance, in the eight years after 1900, Canada went from being of negligible importance to being the single most important market for British Guyana's sugar exporters.³¹ Barbados experienced a similarly rapid shift in the destination of its sugar: between 1902 and 1909, the percentage going to the Dominions of Canada and Newfoundland soared from 27.1 to 72.9.³²

At a meeting in Halifax in 1905, the Maritime Board of Trade passed a resolution calling for the inclusion of the British West Indies in Canadian Confederation. Support for union was particularly strong in Nova Scotia, which had traditional trade ties to Bermuda and the West Indies.³³ Race factored into Canadian reactions to the Maritime Board of Trade's proposal. Sir Wilfred Laurier, the Liberal Prime Minister, declared that a political union with the West Indies was impracticable in view of distance and 'ethnic origin.' He declared that the Canadian Manufacturers' Association's rival proposal for a reciprocal free trade agreement with the West Indies was much more feasible.³⁴ Laurier's view that different ethnic origins precluded union is especially curious, given that he was a French Canadian from Québec. Nevertheless, Laurier never wavered from his view that the West Indian colonies would not make suitable Canadian provinces. However, when the President of the West India Electric Company, a Canadian tramway and utility

³¹ Table, 'Value of Exports from British Guyana' in Colonial Office memorandum, August 1909, in 'West Indian Commercial Relations with Canada and the United States of America', p.10 in CO 884/10.

³² Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, 141, table 17, 'Value of Barbados Exports to the USA and Canada, 1902-1914'.

³³ *Times*, 'Canada and the West Indies' 24 August 1905, 6. The concept was not itself new and had been discussed in the 1880s. See Stewart, 'Canadian—West Indian Union, 1884–1885'.

³⁴ Sir Wilfred Laurier to John S. Irwin, 20 February 1905, Sir Wilfred Laurier Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, microfilm C-820; Laurier to George Johnson, 8 May 1905 *ibid*, C-822; Laurier to F.T. Frost, 5 September 1906 in *ibid*, C-837.

conglomerate, suggested Confederation with Jamaica in 1909, Laurier replied that Canada might be willing to rule the colony in the same way that the United States administered Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans, it should be pointed out, were attached to the United States for tariff purposes but could not vote in American elections.³⁵ In other words, Laurier was willing to consider quasi-colonial rule by Canada, but not Confederation on equal terms.

The growth of Canadian interest in the West Indies after 1900 coincided with changing attitudes on the part of the West India Committee (WIC), the powerful London-based association that represented West Indian merchants and absentee planters. When the Dominion had suggested a Canada- British West Indies reciprocity agreement in 1890, the WIC had condemned the proposal as a provocative act liable to endanger access to the American market.³⁶ However, the increased tariff protection given by the United States to sugar producers in Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico after the Spanish-American War forced the WIC to re-evaluate their view of the United States. As WIC Chairman Sir Neville Lubbock explained to a delegation of Canadian manufacturers in 1905, while the planters had previously regarded trade with the United States as 'the salvation of the West Indies', they were now prepared to consider reciprocity with Canada. They no longer trembled in fear of American tariff

³⁵ James Hutchinson to Laurier, 9 July 1909; Laurier to Hutchinson, 20 July 1909 in *ibid*, C878.

³⁶ Lubbock, to Lord Knutsford, dated 15 January 1891, reprinted in Memorandum, August 1909, 'West Indian Commercial Relations With Canada and the United States of America', p.6, CO 884/10.

retaliation.³⁷ The West India Committee therefore greeted the 1905 resolution of the Maritime Board of Trade with open minds. Their organ, the *West India Committee Circular*, argued that while the West Indies had no desire to pass under the Stars and Stripes, Union with the Dominion might be the solution to the islands' problems: 'Canada may be in a position to do for the West Indies what the United States is doing for Cuba and Puerto Rico.'³⁸

The Colonial Office, however, remained sceptical of the concept of Canada-West Indies reciprocity and was dead set against actual political union.³⁹ In August 1909, Britain's Free-Trade Liberal government overcame its aversion to imperial preferential tariffs, a *sine qua non* of reciprocity, and appointed a Royal Commission to study how to promote trade between Canada and the West Indies. Extensive hearings were held in Canada and the islands and large numbers of businessmen presented their views on the advisability of the measure. In early 1910, the Commission recommended that the West Indian colonies be allowed to negotiate a trade agreement with Canada. In Ottawa, the Laurier government said it was willing to open negotiations the moment the West Indian

³⁷ Memorandum, August 1909, 'West Indian Commercial Relations With Canada and the United States of America', p.10 CO 884/10; *West India Committee Circular*, 'Canada and the West Indies' 4 July 1905, 263-4. For Lubock's address to a delegation from the Canadian Manufacturers' Association see *ibid*, 'Luncheon for the Canadian Visitors' 3 July 1911, 261-2.

³⁸ *West India Committee Circular*, editorial, 31 August 1905, 342-3.

³⁹ Colonial Office Memorandum, August 1909, 'West Indian Commercial Relations With Canada and the United States of America', CO 884/10.

islands were ready to negotiate *en bloc*. Talks between the various colonies aimed at sorting out internal differences began.⁴⁰

Looming over the proposal for a Canada-West Indies trade agreement was the Reciprocity Agreement with the United States announced by Laurier in late January 1911.⁴¹ Guaranteeing free trade in most natural products, the agreement evoked strong responses in Canada. Part the opposition to the agreement came from interest groups, while other Canadians opposed it on ideological grounds.⁴² Robert Borden's Conservative Party condemned the agreement on imperial grounds, arguing that the agreement would result in Canada's economic and perhaps even political annexation by the United States. It would be far better, they said, to promote trade with the United Kingdom and its colonies. Some of Borden's more extreme supporters questioned Laurier's loyalty to the Crown. In Britain, the leaders of the Unionist or Conservative Party were appalled by the Reciprocity Agreement, since it appeared to preclude the creation of the system of Imperial Preference desired so strongly by the Tariff Reformers.⁴³ The denunciations of the agreement in Britain were quoted with good effect by the Canadian Conservatives, who convinced many Canadians that the

⁴⁰ *Times*, 16 August 1909, 'Canada and the West Indies', 7; *ibid*, 'The West Indies and Canada', 19 March 1910, 5; Lord Balfour of Burleigh to John St Loe Strachey, 28 September 1910, in Strachey Papers, House of Lords Record Office, STR/2/5/20.

⁴¹ Ellis, *Reciprocity*, 1911, 77.

⁴² Beaulieu and J Emery, 'Pork Packers, Reciprocity, and Laurier's Defeat in the 1911 Canadian General Election'; Heath Macquarrie, 'Robert Borden and the Election of 1911'.

⁴³ Potter, 'The imperial significance of the Canadian-American reciprocity proposals of 1911'.

agreement would indeed threaten the unity of the Empire.⁴⁴ Between January 1911 and Laurier's defeat in the federal general election in September, Reciprocity became the single most important political issue in Canada.

Thomas Macaulay's February 1911 visit to the Bahamas to promote political union with Canada thus came at an important juncture in Canadian history. It also coincided with the deepest point of a local economic depression that had been largely caused by the tariff policy of the United States.⁴⁵ The stiff duties designed to protect Hawaiian producers established by the 1897 Dingley Tariff had choked off the flow of Bahamian pineapples to the United States, devastating the colony's economy.⁴⁶ The influx of tourist dollars cushioned the blow in Nassau, Bahama's capital, but the impact on the colony's smaller islands was severe. Large numbers of Bahamians fled to Florida to find work. Of the 5,000 'coloureds' in Miami in 1910, 3,500 were from the Bahamas. 1911 was the peak year of the Miami emigration and the very trough of a difficult economic period.⁴⁷

The protectionism of the United States in this period helps to explain why many Bahamians saw trade with Canada as the solution to islands' problems. Another economic factor that increased interest in Canada was the Royal Bank of Canada, which had established a branch in 1908 and played an increasingly important role in

⁴⁴ However, most Canadians were probably skeptical of Rudyard Kipling's claim that the Reciprocity Agreement would cause the Canadian murder rate to equalise with that of the United States. See *Toronto Globe*, 'Notes and Comments' 15 September 1911, 6.

⁴⁵ Randall, Mount, and Bright, *The Caribbean Basin*, 31-84; Bryan, *The Jamaican People: 1880-1902*, 7-8.

⁴⁶ Dilks, *Neville Chamberlain*, 1:37; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 2: 44.

⁴⁷ 'Petition to the Governor of the Bahamas by Bahamians in Miami', 27 October 1911, in CO 23/268; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 2: 219.

the local economy. Sentimental factors, such as a proud United Empire Loyalist heritage, reinforced the sense of affinity with Canada. In 1905, a branch of the Montreal-based Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) was established in Nassau.⁴⁸ Within the non-white population of the Bahamas, there was considerable resentment towards the United States, for Bahamian migrants in Florida had experienced a degree of racial violence unknown in the Bahamas. Judging by the elaborate celebration Black Bahamians in Miami held to celebrate the coronation of King George V in August 1911, some Black Bahamians identified strongly with the British Empire. In short, Bahamian Blacks appear to have subscribed to the imperial identity that British World scholars have shown was common in many British colonies in the era.⁴⁹ Macaulay exploited this identity in making his appeal for union with Canada.

Macaulay's allies in his campaign to bring the Bahamas into Canada included the Sun Life agent in Nassau, Alfred E. Moseley, who was the son of the proprietor of the *Nassau Guardian*. Mary Moseley, the paper's editor, was a pillar of the local IODE. Another important ally was Dr G.J. Johnson, a Bay Street merchant who was a member of the Legislative Assembly and a director of the Bank of Nassau.⁵⁰ Macaulay also brought several Canadians with him to help his campaign. One of them

⁴⁸ When the Bank of Nassau failed in 1916, the Royal Bank absorbed it, thereby protecting both depositors and the value of the bank notes in circulation. Thompson, *An Economic History of the Bahamas*, 11-15; Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, 18.

⁴⁹ See *Nassau Tribune*, 'Coronation Day in Florida', 14 August 1911, 1; for an introduction to the growing literature on the 'British World' see *Canada and the British world*, edited by Buckner and Francis and Brown, 'Black and British'.

⁵⁰ Craton and Saunder, *Islanders in the Stream* 2:209, 234.

was Archibald Chaussegros de Léry Macdonald, the Mayor of the Quebec town of Rigaud. At September 1911 federal election, Macdonald was to stand unsuccessfully as the Conservative candidate in that community.⁵¹

Soon after Macaulay arrived in Nassau, Johnson called a public meeting to discuss union with Canada. Hundreds of leading citizens showed up to hear addresses by Macaulay, Macdonald, and George N. Cole, a member of the Bahamian Legislative Assembly. Macdonald's speech emphasised that joining Canada would bring many financial boons. The moment the Bahamas became a province, the Dominion government would pay for the dredging of Nassau's harbour. He also pointed out that Ottawa gave all Canadian provincial governments a per capita grant to fund schools and the other costs of local governments. Macaulay said that the 'the Dominion would spend five dollars for every dollar of revenue contributed' by Bahamians and that trade with Canada would be mutually beneficial, since the Bahamas and Canada produced complimentary commodities. At the end of the meeting, a resolution was passed asking the Legislative Assembly to investigate the issue of Confederation with Canada.⁵²

The first meeting had been well attended by Nassau's social elite. On 28 February, a second and somewhat larger meeting was held to allow for 'expressions of a more popular nature'.⁵³ Macaulay's remarks to this meeting touched on the issue of race. Macaulay told his audience that he had been asked to address 'colour questions,' but that

⁵¹ *Nassau Tribune*, untitled 18 February 1911, 2.

⁵² *Nassau Guardian*, 'Canada and the Bahamas' 22 February 1911, 2; *Nassau Tribune*, 'Union With Canada', 25 February 1911, 1.

⁵³ *Nassau Guardian*, editorial section 25 February 1911, 2.

there was little to say, for 'in Canada there was no more a colour line than there is in England.' This statement was greeted with applause. He continued: 'your coloured population would at all time be assured of absolutely fair and equal treatment.' Macaulay falsely reported that legislation discriminating on the basis of race was unthinkable in Canada.⁵⁴ Moreover, the Bahamas would be entitled to a fair proportion of the seats in the Dominion Parliament. With two MPs and a Senator to protect their interests, the position of coloured people would be even more secure.⁵⁵

Both of Nassau's papers sounded notes of caution in their editorials on the Canadian initiative. The *Nassau Tribune* saw commercial benefits in joining the Dominion. It repeated Laurier's prediction that the twentieth century would belong to Canada in the same way the nineteenth had belonged to the United States. However, it also reported that 'an erroneous idea seems to exist in the public mind that such a union could be easily accomplished in a few months.' It noted that Canadian Confederation had been first proposed in 1808 and that that the implementation of Confederation in 1867 had been preceded by 'a great number of conferences'. Union with Canada was a worthy goal, but it would take time.⁵⁶ The *Nassau Guardian* expressed dismay over the credulity with which locals had received the 'wildly improbable' promises of the Canadians. The paper flatly declared that it was unlikely that Canada would ever pay for the dredging of

⁵⁴ This report was false because Canada had several racist laws on its books. For example, it imposed a head tax on Chinese immigrants and it also discriminated against non-white British subjects from India who attempted to enter the country. Offer, *The First World War*, 176-197.

⁵⁵ *Sunshine*, May 1911, 38.

⁵⁶ *Nassau Tribune*, editorial, 18 February 1911, 2. The paper later urged 'every merchant in the Bahamas' to join the Canada-West India League, *Nassau Tribune*, editorial, 19 September 1911, 2.

the harbour, the promise it regarded as having had the greatest effect on local thinking.⁵⁷

One correspondent expressed disgust with the childish enthusiasm the Bay Street merchants had shown for the scheme, thinking it extremely unlikely that the ‘the Dominion will, for the asking, elevate a distant island community of 60,000 souls, mostly of the negro race, into the dignity of a Province and straightaway proceed to spend millions on us.’ A commercial agreement providing for the mutual reduction of tariffs was a far more realistic goal.⁵⁸

The issue of joining Canada was raised in the House of Assembly on 13 March by W.B. Johnson, who proposed asking the imperial government for permission to appoint commissioners to negotiate for the admission of the Bahamas as a province. He stated that support for Confederation with Canada was not confined to Nassau and that public meetings on the Out Islands had come out in favour of it. George N. Cole supported the resolution, arguing that becoming part of Canada would improve the economy and stop the haemorrhage of people to the United States. He also pointed out that merely opening negotiations would not bind the legislature to any future course of action.

Not all members of the assembly agreed with the idea of Confederation with Canada. Bay Street merchant Kenneth Solomon opposed the resolution on the grounds of local patriotism. He said that ‘he had driven over Niagara Bridge and had experienced the delight of entering Canada and seeing the Union Jack’ fluttering in the breeze. However, fidelity to the Union Jack was trumped by the local loyalties represented by the conches

⁵⁷ *Nassau Guardian*, editorial, 15 March 1911, 2; *ibid*, editorial, 25 March 1911, 2.

⁵⁸ *Nassau Guardian*, letter from ‘A Bahamian and Proud of it’ 15 March 1911, 2-3.

and pineapples on Bahamian postage stamps. He also argued that ‘from a commercial standpoint, it would be better to go to the United States with 90 millions of people than to Canada with 9 million.’⁵⁹ A man named Sawyer, who was the local agent of the New York Steamship Company, denounced union with Canada.⁶⁰ He said that the people of Jamaica had once been offered the chance to enter Canadian Confederation but had wisely turned it down. Other speakers touched on the issue of race: a legislator named Anderson argued that the Canadian system of responsible government was unsuitable for the racially mixed population of the Bahamas. Despite these criticisms, the resolution in favour of opening negotiations with Canada passed by a vote of twenty-one to six.⁶¹

The story on Macaulay’s activities carried in Canadian newspapers on 2 March 1911 focused on the economic aspects of the scheme and did not introduce the issue of race. The Canadian Press wire service also exaggerated certain details, claiming that 20,000 people had attended the meeting addressed by Macaulay.⁶² In Ottawa, Ontario Conservative MP, Thomas Sproule, spoke in favour of annexing the Bahamas.⁶³ The journal of London’s Royal Colonial Institute, *United Empire*, favoured Macaulay’s proposal on the grounds that the British West Indies would soon need to choose between the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack of Canada. It said that the Canadian option could

⁵⁹ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 2: 262.

⁶⁰ Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 4 April 1911 in CO 23/267.

⁶¹ The debate was reported in the *Nassau Guardian*, ‘The Bahamas Legislature’ 15 March 1911, 2-3.

⁶² *Toronto Globe*, ‘Bahama Islands Would Join Canada: Canadian Press Despatch’, 2 March 1911, 2; *Le Devoir* [Montréal], ‘Il veut s’annexer au Canada’ 2 mars 1911, 6.

⁶³ *Hansard* 1910-11, 18 May 1911, col. 9371.

be made more attractive by inserting clauses protecting ‘coloured people’ into the British North America Act, the British statute that served as Canada’s constitution.⁶⁴

In Nassau, Governor Grey-Wilson asked the Colonial Office for guidance on whether he could comply with the Assembly’s request to open a *pourparler*. In his memorandum on the issue, Lewis Harcourt, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, noted that several Bahamians had advocated union with Canada on the grounds that as a province of Canada, they would be able to export fruit to the United States under the liberal terms of the January 1911 Reciprocity Agreement. He instructed Grey-Wilson to remind the islanders that the agreement explicitly excluded Canadian-grown pineapples and other tropical fruits from free entry into the United States. This clause had been inserted by a far-sighted American diplomat. He thought this clarity on this point would cause the ‘agitation’ in favour of union to fizzle out.⁶⁵ One of the civil servants in the Colonial Office thought that transferring the colony to Canada might hurt British trade, remarking that ‘the centre of gravity of Empire will leave England for Canada in less than a quarter of a century, but we do not wish to accelerate the process at our expense.’⁶⁶

The Colonial Office’s main reasons for disliking the proposed union related to racial issues. It should be remembered that one of the major administrative headaches facing the Colonial Office at this time was the immigration of non-white British subjects

⁶⁴ *United Empire* ‘Bahamas and Canada’ May 1911, 299-300.

⁶⁵ HAC to George Fiddes, 5 April 1911, CO 23/267 file 11105.

⁶⁶ Minute by EWC, 25 May 1911, CO 23/267 file 16891.

into the self-governing Dominions.⁶⁷ Indeed, Charles Prestwood Lucas, the head of the Colonial Office's Dominions section, argued in a 1912 book that the colour question was the 'greatest difficulty in the British Empire.' According to Lucas, the chief threat to imperial unity was the desire of the white working classes of the Dominions to exclude non-white labour.⁶⁸ Gilbert Grindle of the Office's West India section maintained that Britain would be betraying the Blacks of the West Indies if it permitted Canada to annex them: 'no doubt for the moment the Dominion government would safeguard their interests, but there are signs of the rise of a colour question in Canada and in any case it cannot be long before U.S. opinion gives the tone to Canada in regard the Negro.'⁶⁹ The file dealing with Macaulay's campaign contains a newspaper article on the growing hostility of Canadians to Black immigration.⁷⁰

Another Colonial Office official predicted that in the event of union, Canada would not extend full political rights to the Bahamas and would instead administer them 'as a sort of Canadian Crown Colony, much as Australia administers Papua.'⁷¹ Governor

⁶⁷ Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, 183-8; Offer, *The First World War*, 176-197.

⁶⁸ Lucas, *Greater Britain and Greater Rome*, 97. Lucas wistfully remarked that productive labour in the Roman Empire had been done by slaves whose opinions mattered little. In Rome, slaves of different nationalities had toiled alongside each other, but the enfranchised white workers would have none of this.

⁶⁹ Minute by Gregory Grindle, 6 April 1911. CO 23/267 file 11105.

⁷⁰ A clipping of *Times*, 'Negro Immigrants in Canada: Protest from White Settlers' 10 April 1911 was found in CO 23/267, file 12434. In early 1911, Frank Oliver, Canada's Minister of the Interior, had pressured railways into preventing the movement of a group of Blacks from Oklahoma who intended to settle in the Canadian West. Oliver subsequently proposed a regulation prohibiting Black immigration altogether, but the Laurier government never implemented it for reasons that remain obscure. Troper, 'The Creek-Negroes of Oklahoma and Canadian Immigration, 1909-1911'. See also John Schultz, 'White Man's Country: Canada and the West Indian Immigrant, 1900-1965'.

⁷¹ Minute by EWC, 25 May 1911, CO 23/267 file 16891.

Sir William Grey-Wilson later reported to the Colonial Office that some Bahamian Blacks opposed union with Canada out of fear that ‘the Canadian treatment of the Negro will prove more American than British.’⁷²

Convinced that the campaign in favour of union would soon fade away on its own accord, the Colonial Office resolved to do nothing for the time being. Meanwhile, Macaulay had returned to Montreal, where he wrote several letters to Laurier outlining the case for union with the Bahamas and possibly other West Indian territories. Macaulay’s arguments included the notion that the Blacks of the Bahamas were of a ‘higher’ type than the Black underclass of the American South.⁷³ Laurier’s responses to these letters, if any, do not appear to have survived. Macaulay also formed an organization called the Canada West India League.⁷⁴ The decision of Sir Thomas Shaughnessy of the Canadian Pacific Railway to serve as its Honorary President was probably connected to the CPR’s ongoing negotiations to establish a steamer service to the West Indies.⁷⁵ In June, the League began publishing the *Canada West India League Magazine*, a monthly publication that extolled the benefits of Canada-West Indies trade

⁷² Grey-Wilson also noted that some whites feared the exact opposite, namely, that ‘unscrupulous Canadian politicians’ might interfere in the Bahamas and stir the Blacks up against the whites. Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 6 May 1911, CO 23/267 file 16891.

⁷³ Macaulay to Laurier, 23 February 1911 in Laurier Fonds, C-900; Macaulay to Laurier, 6 March 1911 in *ibid*, C-901; Macaulay to Laurier, 20 April 1911, *ibid*, C-903; Macaulay to Laurier, 3 May 1911, *ibid*, C-1168.

⁷⁴ *West India Committee Circular*, ‘Notes of Interest’ 9 May 1911, 233.

⁷⁵ *West India Committee Circular*, ‘Notes of Interest’ 14 February 1911, 87; *West India Committee Circular*, ‘Notes of Interest’ 14 March 1911, 138; *West India Committee Circular*, ‘The West Indies and Canada’ 20 June 1911, 290-1.

and closer political ties.⁷⁶ The magazine carried advertisements for businesses ranging from Jamaican dry goods merchants to the mighty CPR. The *Magazine* assured the people of the West Indies that there would be many financial benefits if they became Canadian provinces. Guest articles by statesmen such as Sir Joseph Ward, Prime Minister of New Zealand, lent credence to the thesis that the proposed union would be good for the Empire as a whole.⁷⁷

In late June and early July, there was a flurry of interest in Jamaica in Confederation with Canada, with some correspondents in the *Kingston Gleaner* coming out in favour of confederation with the ‘coming country of the world.’⁷⁸ Unfortunately for proponents of the scheme, this discussion coincided with a wire service story about the Dominion’s government efforts to prevent a group of Blacks from Oklahoma from settling in the Canadian West.⁷⁹ News of Canada’s actions appeared in publications throughout the British West Indies, including the Bahamas, prompting one correspondent in the *Nassau Guardian* to ridicule Macaulay’s claim that there was no colour line in Canada.⁸⁰ D.A. Corinaldi, an elected member of Jamaica’s Legislative Council, condemned the rich merchants of Kingston for supporting union with Canada, stating that

⁷⁶ *Canada West India Magazine*, ‘What Federation with Canada Would Mean to the West Indies Financially’ June 1911, 11.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

⁷⁸ *Gleaner*, ‘The Talk of Annexation: Prominent Men of the Island State their Views’ 5 July 1911, 6; and letter to the editor from W.H. Farquharson. The *Gleaner*’s editor proposed a Confederation of the British West Indies as an alternative to union with Canada. See *Gleaner*, ‘Position of the West Indies’ 5 July 1911, 10; *ibid*, ‘The Cry of Annexation’, 29 June 1911, 2; *ibid* ‘The Question of Annexation’ 30 June 1911, 13; *ibid* ‘On Federation’ 12 July 1911, 14.

⁷⁹ *Gleaner* ‘Emigration Movement Stopped.’ 5 July 1911, 6.

⁸⁰ *Nassau Guardian*, ‘Negro Immigration Worries Canadians’, ‘Does Canada Want Them?’ and ‘Union with Canada’ in 29 March 1911, 2.

‘the Negroes and the Mulattoes’ of the island would never abandon Britain for the Dominion. Canada’s loyalty to the Crown, he elaborated, was a false loyalty, similar to that which had once been professed by the Yankees. In the course of discussing the Canadian proposal, Corinaldi also denounced the ‘“whitewashed Mulattoes” who put themselves down on the Census papers as Whites.’⁸¹ He seems to have been suggesting that the Bahamas wished to achieve something similar on a collective scale.

In August, the *Canada West India League Magazine* tackled the concerns of Black West Indians by presenting material designed to show that Canadians were racially tolerant. It reprinted two lonely-hearts advertisements it said had recently appeared in an (unspecified) Montreal newspaper. The dark-skinned individuals described in the advertisements, a Jamaican man and a young lady from the Bahamas, were both seeking to marry fair-skinned people of ‘Canadian, English, Scotch, or Irish’ ancestry. The *Magazine* wished the two potential suitors luck in finding a Canadian spouse and then added in a light-hearted vein that while much had been heard in Canada ‘of the annexation of Canada by the United States,’ perhaps the real danger was from West Indians seeking to ‘annex’ individual Canadians.⁸²

Meanwhile, there was a change of government in the Dominion, for the September 1911 election brought Robert Borden’s Conservatives to power. The election had an electric effect on advocates of imperial preference. The *Nassau*

⁸¹ *Gleaner*, ‘The Talk of Annexation’ 5 July 1911, 6.

⁸² *Canada West India Magazine*, ‘Chances for West Indians in Canada’, August 1911, 21. This article was later reprinted in the *Nassau* papers: *Nassau Guardian*, ‘Chances for West Indians in Canada’ 13 September 1911, 2. *Tribune*, ‘Chances for West Indians in Canada’ 19 September 1911, 2.

Guardian rejoiced in the fact Ontario voters had remembered their 'United Empire Loyalist' ancestry and had voted against Reciprocity.⁸³ It also suggested that the display of Bahamian and West Indian produce at Toronto's exhibition may have influenced some votes.⁸⁴ The *Canada West India Magazine* declared that 'the same sentiment that helped kill Reciprocity with the United States will be the strongest factor in bringing about Reciprocity with the West Indies, or any other country owing allegiance to the King.'⁸⁵ On 25 September 1911, Macaulay sent a letter to the paper discussing the implications of Borden's victory for the Bahamas. Macaulay expressed his regrets that A. De Lery Macdonald had not been elected in Vaudreuil but said that even without Macdonald's presence in the Commons, the new parliament would be more supportive of union with the Bahamas than the last.⁸⁶

The Governor of the Bahamas, Sir William Grey-Wilson, had previously played a minor role in the union agitation. However, when he heard of the change of government in Canada, he decided to seize the opportunity. Grey-Wilson cancelled his customary autumn motor-car trip through New England and went to Canada to lobby for the annexation of the Bahamas with Canada. Grey-Wilson's cousin was Lord Grey, Canada's Governor-General. Unfortunately, none of Grey's correspondence with his cousin has survived and we do not know what he thought of either the proposal to make the Bahamas part of the Dominion or his cousin's endorsement of the scheme. We do know that Grey believed that Canada should play a much larger

⁸³ *Nassau Guardian*, editorial, 23 September 1911, 2. Another editorial on Borden's glorious victory appeared on 30 September 1911, 2.

⁸⁴ *Nassau Guardian*, editorial, 13 September 1911, 2.

⁸⁵ *Canada West India Magazine*, September 1911, 12.

⁸⁶ *Nassau Guardian*, 'The Bahamas and the Canadian Election', 7 October 1911, 2.

role in the West Indies. In fact, he planned to visit the island on HMCS *Niobe*, a warship of the new Royal Canadian Navy, so as to awaken West Indians to the possibility of closer ties with Canada.⁸⁷ Another clue to Grey's thinking is provided by his response to the proposals for the annexation of Bermuda. When the Governor of Bermuda proposed Confederation with Canada as a way of counteracting the growing American influence in that colony, Grey's reply, while non-committal, did not dismiss the idea.⁸⁸

Grey-Wilson's October 1911 speech to Toronto's Empire Club touched on the racial implications of union with Canada, a topic that had been on his mind for months. Grey-Wilson presented the annexation of the Bahamas as an experiment that would allow Canada to decide whether it should acquire other islands in the British West Indies. He explained that while many Black Bahamians had the vote, the islands had evolved safeguards to limit Black participation. He elaborated that while the electorate was largely Black, 'the black man almost invariably elects a white man to represent him.' This system, he said, had spared the islands from the 'horrors of the situation in the Southern States of America'. Even in the most isolated regions of the colony, white women were as secure as they would be in Toronto. Grey-Wilson also said that Confederation with Canada would require new safeguards, for local elections would be more consequential after a union than they were at present. He said that

⁸⁷ Grey to Argyll, 13 February 1911, Grey of Howick Papers, University of Durham Library, Archives and Special Collections, Box 178/16. On Grey's West Indies initiative, see Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 1: 145.

⁸⁸ Sir Josceline Heneage Wodehouse to Grey, 15 April 1908, 19 June 1908, 3 July 1908, 21 December 1908 in University of Durham Archives, Grey of Howick Papers, Box 179/13.

while no explicit reference to race or colour should ever be made, union with Canada should coincide with the introduction of stiffer monetary requirements for electors. He conceded that such a franchise would shut out ‘some of the whites’ in the course of excluding most of the Blacks, but said that this was a necessary evil.⁸⁹

The Governor’s remarks were reported in the Toronto papers and soon gained a wide circulation.⁹⁰ In London, the *Standard of Empire* hailed Grey-Wilson’s Toronto speech, claiming that his franchise prescription was the magic solution needed to unify Canada and the Bahamas.⁹¹ The Governor’s remarks caused considerable embarrassment and frustration for the staff of the Colonial Office.⁹² Reactions in the Bahamas were highly mixed. Expressing the hope that the Governor had been misquoted, the *Nassau Tribune* argued that the existing electoral qualifications in the colony would work well for elections to the Dominion Parliament. The paper declared that its support for union with Canada was undiminished by the controversy over Grey-Wilson’s remarks, a comment which suggests that they had affected the thinking of others in the colony. One correspondent opined that if annexation to Canada took place, ‘our young men (coloured) may stand no better chances, but they certainly will be no worse off.’⁹³

⁸⁹ Speech by Thomas Grey-Wilson, 25 October 1911, *The Empire Club of Canada Speeches 1911-1912*, 40-47.

⁹⁰ *Toronto Globe*, ‘Bahamas Governor Appeals for Union’ 27 October 1911, 9.

⁹¹ *Standard of Empire*, ‘Canada as Overlord of the West Indian Isles. Proposed New Dominion Province’ 3 November 1911, 1.

⁹² Minute by Harcourt on Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 15 December 1911 in CO 23/269.

⁹³ *Nassau Tribune*, ‘Union With Canada’ editorial 21 November 1911, 2; *Nassau Tribune*, letter from ‘Britisher’, 21 November, 3.

In November, the *Nassau Guardian* reported Grey-Wilson's remarks and then declared that it was unimpressed with the arguments in favour of political union with Canada, as distinct from a trade agreement. It also connected the question of union to a recent report that a group of Black clergyman had experienced difficulties in finding hotel accommodation in Toronto. The paper remarked that well-dressed Blacks would not have experienced discrimination of this sort in Britain. Returning to the subject of Grey-Wilson's remarks in December, the paper opined that the Dominion would never favour a sizeable Black electorate and that it wished to become the 'overlord' of the West Indies rather than to admit the islands on the basis of equality.⁹⁴ The paper refrained from making any additional comments on Grey-Wilson during his remaining months as Governor of the Bahamas.

On 9 April 1912, Canadian negotiations concluded a trade agreement with most of the British colonies in West Indies. The deal committed the West Indian colonies to admit specified Canadian agricultural goods at duties at 20% below those levied on similar goods from other countries. An additional preference for Canadian flour was also mandated. In return, Canada increased the preference accorded to sugar and other tropical commodities from the British West Indies. Canada also promised to improve the steamer service. The governments of Trinidad, British Guyana, Barbados, St Lucia, St Vincent, Antigua, St Kitt's-Nevis, Dominica, and Montserrat swiftly

⁹⁴ *Nassau Guardian*, 'Annexation of the Bahamas', 'Coloured Delegates Find Difficulty in Securing Rooms' 1 November 1911, 2; *Nassau Guardian*, 'Canada and the Indies', 2 December 1911, 2.

agreed to the terms negotiated at Ottawa. The Canadian Parliament ratified the agreement with little debate.⁹⁵

For reasons that were obscure to contemporaries, the Legislative Assembly of the Bahamas opted not to send a representative to the Ottawa conference. As a result, the Bahamas were not party of the agreement. C.P. Lucas of the Colonial Office attributed the failure of the Bahamas to appoint a delegate to the colony's single-minded obsession with political union with Canada.⁹⁶ There was a certain amount of truth in this analysis, for a resolution passed by a public meeting in Nassau on 13 February 1912 ignored the ongoing trade talks and had focused on confederation with Canada.⁹⁷ Other factors behind the Bahamian decision not to ratify the agreement included fear of American tariff retaliation and the clause stipulating that preference would only be extended to goods shipped between Canada and the West Indies via direct routes. Bahamians objected to this restriction because it precluded shipping goods in bond to Canada via American railways.⁹⁸

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 appears to have pushed the concept of Canada West Indian union from the mind of Thomas Macaulay. Busy with

⁹⁵ *West Indies Committee Circular* 'The Ottawa Conference' 23 April 1912, 196; Great Britain *Parliamentary Papers* (1913) 'Ordinances of West Indian Colonies giving effect to the Canadian-West Indian Preferential Tariff Agreement, signed at Ottawa 9th April 1912.' Cmd. 6674, vol. xlv, p. 821; *West Indies Committee Circular*, 28 January 1913, 27; *Manchester Guardian*, 'Canada and the West Indies' 6 July 1912, 9; 'Canadian and West Indian Reciprocity' 28 September 1912, 11.

⁹⁶ Lucas to Grindle, 14 March 1912, in CO 23/269.

⁹⁷ Colonial Office to Grey-Wilson, 30 March 1912, draft, in CO 23/269.

⁹⁸ *Nassau Guardian*, editorial, 6 April 1912, 2; *ibid*, editorial 21 August 1912, 2; *ibid*, editorial, 21 August 1912; Speech by Robert Borden, 24 January 1913 in *Hansard*, 1912-1913, vol. 2, col. 2121-2.

various patriotic causes in Montreal, he had little time for West Indian projects. The high point of his wartime career came in 1917, when he became Chairman of the National Committee on Food Resources.⁹⁹ However, interest in bringing the British West Indies into Confederation did not evaporate entirely during the conflict. Toronto lumber exporter Harry Crowe suggested to Borden that they be made Canadian provinces. Crowe argued that the ‘intelligent coloured professional men’ of Jamaica would help ‘adorn’ the Canadian Parliament.¹⁰⁰ Crowe’s relatively liberal assumptions were not shared by those in power. Robert Borden’s wartime conversations with Lloyd George on the subject of Canada-West Indian union revealed that both men envisioned the West Indies as colonial territories ruled by Canada; there were to be no MPs from the West Indies, coloured, intelligent, or otherwise sitting in Ottawa.¹⁰¹ None of the official discussions of Canada West India union contemplated anything resembling provincial status for the non-white colonies.

The armistice in November 1918 re-awakened Macaulay’s interest in Canada’s ties to the West Indies, albeit for just a brief period. In early 1919 Macaulay sent Borden a letter recommending closer ties with the West Indies and announcing that he was about to leave on a fact finding mission to the region.¹⁰² Upon his return,

⁹⁹ Macaulay to Borden, 3 April 1918, in Borden Fonds, C-4415.

¹⁰⁰ Crowe also that the annexation of the British West Indies might cause the island of Newfoundland to unite with Canada. Crowe to Borden, 13 September 1916 in Borden Fonds, C-4314. See also Crowe to Borden, 29 April, 30 May, 2 June, 30 August 1916 in Borden Fonds, C-4314.

¹⁰¹ George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, 1: 368. Leo Amery, a British MP, proposed that all territories in the western hemisphere, including the Falklands, be given to Canada Amery to Balfour, 22 August 1918, Balfour Papers, British Library Manuscripts Room, Add. 49775 ff. 185-8; Louis, *In the Name of God Go!*, 54.

¹⁰² Macaulay to Borden, 3 February 1919, Borden Papers, C4314.

Macaulay informed Borden that few in the colonies desired annexation by Canada, at least in the foreseeable future. Macaulay advised that Canadians should 'abandon for the moment the idea of political union' and focus on the more practical project of a preferential tariff agreement.¹⁰³ Taking his own advice, Macaulay concentrated his energies on lobbying for improved transport with the West Indies and reciprocal tariff reductions, two issues which preoccupied him for most of the 1920s.¹⁰⁴ He never again raised the issue political union.

Macaulay's realization that it would be impossible to bring the Bahamas or any other British possession into Confederation dovetailed with a rapid change in thinking in Ottawa. In early 1919, the Canadian government abandoned its wartime plans for the annexation of Jamaica and other islands in the West Indies. As P.G. Wigley suggests, Borden's ultimate decision to refrain from claiming any territory for Canada at the Paris Peace Conference was driven by complex diplomatic considerations, including the desire to placate the United States, rather than any liberal aversion to colonial rule.¹⁰⁵

The liberal aspects of Macaulay's thinking underscore the difficulties in generalizing about the effects of membership in the British Empire on Canadian ideas

¹⁰³ Macaulay to Borden, 27 June 1919, Borden Papers, C-4314. Macaulay did note that there was still widespread support for union with Canada in the Bahamas.

¹⁰⁴ Macaulay to Meighen, March 1, 1926, Arthur Meighen Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, C-3476; Macaulay to King, 4 June 1925, 18 June 1925, Mackenzie King Fonds, Library and Archives, C-2278. Macaulay represented the Leeward Island when the Canada-West Indies trade agreement was renegotiated in 1925. The Depression marked the end of his interest in the West Indies: Macaulay suffered serious reversals in his personal finances and was forced to give up his political issues. He died in 1942. Obituary for Thomas Bassett Macaulay, *Montreal Gazette*, 4 April 1942, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Wigley, 'Canada and Imperialism: West Indian Aspirations and the First World War.'

about race. Macaulay's experience shows that on the eve of the First World War, Canada's imperialists came in many varieties. Robert Borden's imperialism was coloured by ideas of racial superiority, but Macaulay's imperialism was not. There is little evidence to suggest that Macaulay was less of an imperialist than Borden, but his attitudes towards race were much more liberal than those of the Prime Minister.

Macaulay's 1911 campaign forces us to rethink a notion suggested by much of the British World literature, namely that the White Dominions' membership in the British World intensified rather than diminished their racism. Had Macaulay's 1911 mission to the Bahamas forces us to think carefully about the role of race in the making of Canada's boundaries. It also raises an interesting counterfactual: had Canadians in the age of high imperialism been more tolerant of non-whites, Canada might have become a larger country and made the transition to multiculturalism at a comparatively early date.

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